

Testimony of Martin Sempa
US House Committee on International Relations
Chairman Henry Hyde (R-IL) Presiding
“US Response to Global AIDS Crisis-A Two-Year Review”
April 13, 2005
2172 Rayburn House Office Building

I AM MARTIN SSEMPA, A UGANDA COLLEGE MINISTER.

MORE THAN 10 YEARS AGO, AS A STUDENT AT THE SAME UNIVERSITY WHERE I TEACH, I WATCHED MY BROTHER AND SISTER PAINFULLY DIE FROM AIDS.

AS A TEENAGER I WAS SEXUALLY PROMISCOUS AND ON THE SAME PATH TO DEATH AS MY BROTHER AND SISTER. THEN I CAME TO UNDERSTAND AND EMBRACE THE MESSAGES OF ABSTINENCE AND FAITHFULNESS.

FOR THESE REASONS I MINCE NO WORDS WHEN I ADDRESS MY FELLOW UGANDANS AND I SHALL MINCE NO WORDS WITH YOU. THE REASON UGANDANS AND OTHER AFRICANS ARE DYING IS BECAUSE OF SEXUAL PROMISCUITY. THAT IS WHAT IS KILLING US. FOR THESE REASONS I WAS HEARTENED TO SEE THE UNITED STATES' PLANS TO INVEST MORE HEAVILY IN FIGHTING AIDS IN AFRICA, AND DO SO IN A WAY THAT NOT ONLY REFLECTS REALITY BUT THAT RESPECTS OUR NATION'S CULTURE AND RELIGION. BY THIS I MEAN THE "ABC" APPROACH, SPECIFICALLY A AND B UNFORTUNETLY, THE USAID AND CDC AGENCIES CONTINUE TO PROMOTE PROMISCUITY AND CONDOMS, AND ARE NOT ALLOWING FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS TO HELP US. IT IS BUSINESS AS USUAL HERE, WE ARE BEGINNING TO LOSE HOPE WE IN AFRICA NEED TO CHANGE OUR BEHAVIOUR AND US REPRESENTATIVES IN UGANDA AND OTHER AFRICAN COUNTRIES NEED TO ACTIVELY IMPLEMENT THE ABC PROGRAM

PRESIDENT BUSH AND CONGRESS HAVE APPROVED, WITH THE GREATEST EMPHASIS ON THE A AND B.

WHEN PRESIDENT MUSEVENI AND HIS WIFE ASSUMED POWER FROM IDI AMIN IN THE MID 1980'S THE COUNTRY WAS IN CHAOS. ALL FOREIGN ADVISORS HAD FLED. WE HAD NO FUNDS TO PURCHASE CONDOMS EVEN IF WE WANTED TO SO. THEREFORE, THE MUSEVENIS SPOKE TO THEIR PEOPLE IN THE SAME WAY THEY SPOKE TO THEIR CHILDREN ABOUT HIV/AIDS. "ABSTAIN AND YOU WILL NOT GET IT (MEANING HIV/AIDS)" AND BE FAITHFUL TO ONE UNINFECTED PARTNER AND YOU WILL NOT GET IT." AT THE TIME WE CALLED THE "B" MESSAGE "ZERO GRAZING" MEANING GRAZE IN YOUR OWN YARD AND NOT IN YOUR NEIGHBORS YARD.

PRESIDENT MUSEVENI ACTUALLY TRAVELLED FROM VILLAGETO VILLAGE WITH A BULLHORN DELIVERING THE ABC MESSAGE WITH AN EMPHASIS ON A AND B. HE ADDED THAT IF YOU DID NOT ADHERE TO HIS WARNING YOU WOULD "D" DIE.

THE FIRST LADY OF UGANDA WAS VOCAL ABOUT THE PROGRAM AND ALL PUBLIC AND MANY PRIVATE AGENCIES WERE INVOLVED AND HAD THEIR OWN OBJECTIVES AND WORK PLANS. THE HEALTH MINISTRY, THE LOCAL HEALTH AGENCIES, THE SCHOOLS, THE CHURCHES AND OTHER FAITH BASED ORGANIZATIONS, THE NEWSPAPERS AND THE RADIO—ALL WERE INVOLVED. AND THE PROGRAM WORKED. HIV/AIDS INCIDENCE RATES

FELL IN THE LATE 1980S AND THE HIV/AIDS PREVALENCE RATE FELL FROM 21% IN 1992 TO AROUND 6% IN 2002. I KNOW OF NO OTHER COUNTRY WHICH HAS CUT ITS HIV/AIDS PREVALENCE RATE BY TWO-THIRDS.

PRESIDENT BUSH SAW AND EMBRACED THE UGANDA ABC PROGRAM AND MADE IT THE PRESCRIBED HIV/AIDS PREVENTION METHOD FOR THE UNITED STATES. THE ABC PREVENTION METHOD WAS INCLUDED IN THE PEPFAR PLAN WHICH WAS APPROVED BY THE WHITE HOUSE AND CONGRESS. SO YOU WOULD THINK EVERYTHING WOULD BE GOOD. RIGHT? WRONG.

TODAY WE FACE A NEW ENEMY IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV/AIDS NOT ONLY IN UGANDA BUT IN ALL THE OTHER AFRICAN COUNTRIES. THAT ENEMY IS THE WESTERN BELIEF THAT CONDOMS CAN END THE HIV/AIDS EPIDEMIC.

AS YOU NOW KNOW, THE UGANDA ABC PROGRAM HAS PRODUCED SPECTACULAR RESULTS. CONDOM SOCIAL MARKETING, THE PRIMARY HIV/AIDS PREVENTION METHOD PROMOTED BY THE US AND OTHER WESTERN DONORS FOR THE LAST 18 YEARS HAS NOT WORKED. IN FACT, IN MARCH 2004 UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PROFESSOR NORMAN HEARST AND SAN FRANCISCO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH EPIDEMIOLOGIST SANNY CHEN REPORTED IN THE JOURNAL "STUDIES IN FAMILY PLANNING" THAT EXTENSIVE COMPUTERIZED SEARCHES OF SCIENTIFIC CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS AND PROFESSIONAL JOURNALS

UNCOVERED NO EVIDENCE THAT CONDOM SOCIAL MARKETING HAS
STEMMED THE DISEASE IN A GENERALIZED EPIDEMIC IN ANY COUNTRY
IN THE WORLD.

SO, WHAT IS THE PROBLEM? THE PROBLEM IS THAT MOST OF THE PEOPLE
IN USAID AND CDC DO NOT LIKE THE ABC MESSAGE. THEY LIKE THE
CONDOM SOCIAL MARKETING MESSAGE. WHY? WHY?

I BELIEVE IT'S BECAUSE THE UGANDA ABC PROGRAM WAS ESTABLISHED
BY AFRICANS FOR AFRICANS. THIS ANGERS MANY SO CALLED
"PROFESSIONALS" IN THE AIDS COMMUNITY WHO HAVE PROMOTED
CONDOM SOCIAL MARKETING.

AIDS PREVENTION IS NOW A BILLION DOLLAR INDUSTRY BASED UPON
SUPPLYING HIV PREVENTION PROGRAMS THAT CENTERS ON THE
DISTRIBUTION OF CONDOMS.

ABSTINENCE AND BE FAITHFUL DOES NOT GENERALLY FIT IN WITH THE
WORLD VIEW OF MANY IN THE AIDS COMMUNITY AND THEIR LIKE
MINDED FRIENDS.

SO WHAT HAVE THE USAID AND CDC PERSONNEL DONE IN UGANDA AND
OTHER COUNTRIES TO DEFEAT ABC AND PROMOTE CONDOM SOCIAL
MARKETING.

1. THEY DISCONTINUED FUNDING A, B, AND ABC PLANS. I HAVE WITH ME AND HAVE PROVIDED TO YOU COPIES OF THE LATEST 3 HIV/AIDS PREVENTION PROGRAM PLANNING DOCUMENTS THAT HAVE BEEN PAID FOR AND/OR SUPPORTED BY USAID. THEY ARE BEREFT OF AB OR EVEN ABC ACTIVITIES.

2. THEY GAVE FUNDING TO PSI, A CONDOM SOCIAL MARKETING FIRM TO BE A PRIMARY ABSTINENCE PROVIDER. WHAT A JOKE THIS WOULD BE IF LIVES WERE NOT AT STAKE. HOW CAN THE LEADING SOCIAL CONDOM MARKETING AGENCY BECOME AN ABSTINENCE ADVOCATE OVERNIGHT?"

3. BY USING PSI IT ALLOWS THEM TO TURN AWAY FAITH BASED GROUPS. I WAS REFERRED BY US OFFICIALS TO PSI. WHEN I TOLD THEM I WOULD NOT PROMOTE CONDOMS BECAUSE MY CONSCIENCE SAYS DISTRIBUTING CONDOMS TO KIDS IS "A TICKET TO DEATH" ONE OF THE PSI MANAGERS INFORMED ME "IF WE ARE GOING TO WORK TOGETHER...WE HAD TO INCLUDE CONDOMS AS A COMPONENT OF OUR PREVENTION." I CAN NAME A HALF DOZEN ABSTINENCE GROUPS WHICH HAVE NOT BEEN FUNDED BECAUSE OF THEIR POSITION AGAINST CONDOMS.

4. US GOVERNMENT PERSONAL ARE NOW ATTEMPTING TO ENCODE THE USAID-FUNDED NATIONAL CONDOM POLICY AND STRATEGY INTO UGANDA LAW WHICH WOULD JUSTIFY MORE SPENDING ON COMDOM DISTRIBUTION AND MAKE IT HARDER FOR ABSTINENCE GROUPS TO COMPETE.

NOW YOU MIGHT ASK “BUT WHY ARE THE USAID AND CDC GROUPS SO INFLUENTIAL IN UGANDA. WHY DOESN’T THE UGANDA GOVERNMENT TAKE ACTION AGAINST THESE AGENCIES IF THEY FEEL SO STRONGLY ABOUT THIS ISSUE?

IN UGANDA AND IN MANY OTHER POOR AFRICAN COUNTRIES MORE THAN HALF THE REVENUES COME FROM OVERSEAS DONORS WITH THE US BEING THE PRIMARY DONOR. IN ADDITION, USAID AND CDC FUND INDIVIDUALS AT INTERNATIONAL RATES WHICH ARE TYPICALLY MANY TIMES WHAT THESE PEOPLE WOULD OTHERWISE EARN. MAKE NO MISTAKE ABOUT IT, YOU AND YOUR IN-COUNTRY REPRESENTATIVES ARE VERY, VERY INFLUENTIAL.

TODAY THE ABSTINENCE MESSAGES ARE GONE. GONE ARE THE ‘AIDS KILLS’ ADS WARNING TEENAGERS TO ABSTAIN. GONE ARE THE SIGNS THAT ONCE WARNED TRUCK DRIVERS TO “DRIVE HOME TO THEIR WIVES.” THE ABSTINENCE BILLBOARDS HAVE BEEN REPLACED WITH NEW BILLBOARDS ADVERTISING CONDOMS WITH SLOGANS LIKE “SO STRONG, SO SMOOTH.” AND THE HIV/AIDS RATE HAS BEGUN TO TICK UPWARDS. IN THE RAKAI DISTRICT WHERE CONDOM PROMOTION OVERSHADOWS THE PROMOTION OF ABSTINENCE AND MARITAL FIDELITY, USAID HAS INCREASED THE LEVEL OF CONDOM USE ONLY TO FIND THAT THE RATE OF NEW INFECTIONS, WHICH HAD BEEN DECLINING, IS NOW BACK ON AN

UPWARD TREND. NEW INFECTIONS AMONG MEN HAVE INCREASED BY 50%
OVER A DECADE AGO.

CONGRESSMEN AND CONGRESSWOMEN I ASK ONLY ONE SIMPLE THING.
PLEASE RESPECT US AS PEOPLE. PLEASE RESPECT THE WISHES OS OUR
PRESIDENT AND FIRST LADY. PLEASE RESPECT OUR CULTURE. ASK YOUR
AGENCIES IN UGANDA AND ELSEWHERE TO IMPLEMENT THE ABC
PROGRAM PRESENTED BY THE WHITE HOUSE AND APPROVED BY
CONGRESS. MANY MORE OF US WILL DIE UNLESS YOU DO. MANY OF US
WILL BE SAVED IF YOU DO.